

Hooper, J.S.M.

The approach to the Gospel.

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THE APPROACH
to the
GOSPEL.

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Addresses delivered to the Annual Conference
of the American Presbyterian Mission
of Western India at Panhala,
Kolhapur.

BY THE
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WESLEYAN MISSION, MADRAS.

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The address form of these papers has been preserved in deference to the wishes of those whose kindly insistence has led to their publication.

The line of thought is the result of personal experience in work among Hindus, and has the merit of having been wrought out and tested in practice. To say this, however, is not to minimise a very great obligation to such writers as Carnegie Simpson, T. R. Glover, William Temple — and many others of an older day.

J. S. M. H.

Clearing the Ground.

We live in a period when many attempts are being made to restate the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For a number of years, from within the Church, no less than from without it, there have been persistent criticisms of the life of the Church for a great variety of reasons. There has been noted a lack of any characteristic Christian vitality among Christians, as well as a decline in the power of so-called religious motives to influence men in general. The spirit of criticism was strong before the war, and during the war it has been intensified; there is a very wide-spread impatience at what is called the remoteness of the Church from reality, and some of those who care most keenly for the advancement of the Kingdom of God in the world are persuaded that to meet the new conditions after the war there will be needed a remodelled Church and a restated Gospel.

Our immediate concern here is not with the Church, nor do I propose to attempt anything so ambitious as a restatement of the Gospel; but it is difficult to over-estimate the importance of such re-statements to us who are missionaries. There are some re-statements which would rob us of any Gospel to preach; there may well be others which will greatly strengthen us in the carrying out of our calling. I will venture to define the missionary's aim in a line from one of the hymns of the Methodist revival of the

18th century; "Oh let me commend my Saviour to you;" and on that basis of personal responsibility and privilege I propose to make some suggestions as to the method which may most suitably be followed in the "commending" of Jesus Christ to Hindus.

And first, the ground must be cleared by the consideration of some negative positions—negative, because they of necessity take the form of criticism of methods very widely followed by many missionaries and by probably the great majority of Indian Christian workers.

I Let us beware of a premature emphasis on theology.

I will illustrate my meaning. A few weeks ago we opened up work in a Parcheri in which hitherto there has been no Christian instruction, and a Bible-woman was sent to teach in some of the homes—homes full of poverty and ignorance and squalor. The Bible-woman was full of sympathy for the people, and was able at once to establish friendly relations with them; but she felt that it was also, and perhaps chiefly, her duty to preach Christianity to them. Accordingly, when the missionary went with her, on the Bible-woman's second or third visit to the place, the women were put through a sort of catechism to show what they had learnt, thus: "How many Persons are there? And what does the Father do? And what does the Son do? And what does the Holy Spirit do?"—and the answers came pat. It is surely difficult to imagine anything more parthetically futile as a gospel agency than the doctrine of the Trinity in such a setting.

Christian theology is the attempt to explain God on the evidence supplied by Jesus Christ, and such value as it has depends on the value attached to Jesus Christ. To teach it before Jesus Christ has been shown to possess any value, before the slightest interest has been roused in Jesus Christ, is to deprive it of any possible efficacy. It may be worth something to philosophers as a branch of philosophy, entirely independent of its origin; but as a means of leading to the surrender of the life to God it must be preceded by at least interest in Jesus. The rousing of this interest then must be the first concern of the missionary, and if there has been failure here it is sufficient to account for many phenomena in mission work for which the explanation has been sought elsewhere. Now, speaking generally, we have not succeeded in rousing a very widespread or a very deep interest in Jesus Christ; the results of missionary work may be viewed from many standpoints and may be interpreted in many ways; but whether we look at the intensive work that has been done, or at the extensive permeating influence of Christian teaching and example in this country, we must acknowledge that He is not looked to with the interest and excitement that the claims we make for Him should create.

It is not difficult to see reasons for this comparative failure to secure for Jesus the place in men's attention that we feel He should have. None of us can examine ourselves or our communities without the painful and humiliating recognition that whatever our words may have been, our lives have not been "living epistles" of the right kind. We have failed

in Christlikeness, and frequently in those very grace of the Christian character whose absence is most culpable in the Indian judgment. We have failed in adaptability of thought and custom. We have failed through professionalism of one sort and another. Some of us have failed too because we have not sufficiently realised that Christ is our gospel, that Christ is Christianity. And some of us have failed, I believe, through sheer psychological ineptitude. We have forgotten that our business in India is not simply to throw out what to us appears to be the truth, as if the sower in the parable provided a complete analogy to the missionary; our most effective work should probably be rather along the lines of the one who brought his friends to introduce them to his Friend: our aim is to "commend" our Saviour.

Now in the bringing together of friends of ours, who have not previously met each other, and who we greatly desire should like each other, some of us have learnt one or two things by painful experience. It does not pay to be continually singing the praise of the absent friends in superlatives; our very enthusiasm becomes nauseating to one who has not met him, and when at last the long-desired meeting takes place our friend in the flesh has no chance, because of our unrestrained and apparently fulsome ecstasies; he may succeed finally in securing the place that we desired for him, but it will be after conquering the prejudice that we have created against him by our undiscerning praises. What we say must be dictated by the affection of our heart, but it must be directed and controlled by the wisdom that comes from an imagi-

native insight into the mind of the one we wish to influence. Now it is quite clear that in the judgment of the Christian, no language about Jesus Christ can be extravagant. The first disciples, fresh from the overwhelming experience of Pentecost and from the recognition of the meaning of familiar facts which that experience gave them, were filled with a faith in Him which overtaxed all the resources of their language. The Apostle Paul, notably in the Epistle to the Ephesians, attempts by piling word on word and phrase on phrase to explain something of what Christ means to him and the created universe; but he too is baffled; the riches of Christ are not to be traced out. And right through the Christian centuries the witness has been the same, so that even in Christian hymnology, where to the power of exalted language has been added the almost magic power of music, the last word has always been such as St. Bernard's:—

O Hope of every contrite heart,
 O Joy of all the meek,
 To those who ask, how kind Thou art,
 How good to those who seek!
 But what to those who find? Ah! this
 Nor tongue nor pen can show:
 The love of Jesus, what it is,
 None but His loved ones know...

or, as, an 18th century poet puts it,

Eternity's too short
 To utter all Thy praise.

The experience behind such words as these rings true, and we do well to remind ourselves of it and test ourselves by it from time to time. But our present

question is not with the genuinesness of our own experience, but with the best method of bringing others into a like knowledge of Jesus Christ. Language that is inevitable in rapture and passion, and that because of its obvious spontaneity and reality is effective, ceases at once to be effective when it is produced, so to speak, to order; it sounds artificial as soon as it is reduced to dogmatic expression and embodied in a theological definition. And this brings us at once to what I have called the psychological ineptitude of much of our work.

We have to guard against the appearance of fulsomeness, and to guard also against the ever-present risk of artificiality. There are thus laid upon us two urgent and searching necessities. The first is, that we must keep out of our doctrine all such statements as, though true enough in themselves, are lacking in the evidence of the experience on which they rest. In other words, we must not preach anything that we and our workers are incapable of practising; doctrine that is up in the air and unconnected with the common earth is not of service as an evangelising agency. If I may be permitted an illustration, we have a glorious doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God in the hearts of men, and we teach, with good Biblical authority, that where the Spirit is there are to be found the varied fruits of the Spirit, produced not by the unremitting effort of the individual but by the outflowing life of God within, spontaneously; responding to culture and attention, but emphatically not added on to life so much as growing out of it. And of those one is said to be

Joy. Now, a few months ago, a friend of mine, not a missionary, had occasion to visit a friend who was staying at a hill station in a missionary home, and she was present at of their meals, when some sixty or eighty missionaries from all parts of all India were gathered together. The general impression conveyed by the face of that company was, as reported to me, that they were a set of people who looked as though "they had a grievance against the world." They may have been caught during an unfortunate half hour; but good fruit in bulk must not turn sour if those who are pushing it as sweet and satisfying are to be successful. I do not ignore the most serious implications of what I am now saying, for ourselves and for the great host of Indian workers of all kinds who are associated with us. I recognise that for many of us there would be far less talking about the high truths of our religion if we were compelled to bring everything that we said to the hard test of verifiable experience. But after all, the chief merit of the Christian religion is that it works, and its chief argument is that it can be demonstrated to work in the lives of ordinary men. We thus weaken our gospel incalculably when we tacitly allow it to sink on to the level of mere theological theorising; when we allow the atonement to be preached by men who have mastered its literature, but who are ignorant of its power, or assume that the ability to repeat the clause of a creed or prayer has any sort of necessary connection with following the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second necessity that is laid upon us rises out of the first. If we are to preach anything like a

full gospel it can only be by ourselves maintaining a fresh realisation of its power. If we are to allow ourselves to speak on our greatest theme of all, the overflowing love of God, we must genuinely mean what we say, and not drift into repeating things that we have read, or perhaps experienced twenty years ago. It may be that in the case of some of us our consciousness of love to God will sometimes rise to heights of ecstasy which set at nought natural restraints and which compel their expression in lofty song or such passionate language as that of Samuel Rutherford or St. Catherine of Siena. Others of different temperament will experience God in ways less vivid perhaps, though no less real. But in any case, the measure of the gospel we preach will be, not our intellectual appreciation of it, but our experimental knowledge of its reality, so that whether we are seeking to lead others in the first steps of their approach to the gospel, or talking with them about its more philosophical implications we shall preach nothing as of the essence of the gospel which living Christian experience cannot support and exemplify.

II. We must beware of a premature emphasis on the Livinity of Jesus Christ.

There are two distinct ways of preaching Christ to those who know nothing about Him. The one is to start with the statement of His divinity and to tell the story of His life and death and resurrection as of God incarnate. There is much in the Indian mind to which this makes a ready appeal, and in the story of various *avatars* in this country there is a very

fascinating, if perhaps rather dangerous, kind of *preparatio evangelica*. It is a method that has been very widely followed and one which comes quite naturally to all our Indian fellow-workers; it satisfies a certain instinct within ourselves, and we may fairly assume that it is therefore a method which will never lack adherents. It is not my purpose to enter here upon a detailed criticism of it; but there are two remarks that I will make. It appears to me that the method starts by assuming the conclusion that we wish to reach; the value of Thomas's cry "My Lord and My God" was that it came as the culmination of his experience of his Master; it was not a theological dogma imposed by authority but the irresistible conclusion of his own heart and mind. And further, the very readiness of the Hindu mind to accept the story of the Incarnation should remind us that what we mean by the divinity of Jesus and what they mean by divinity are two entirely distinct things. Their conception of divinity is inclusive to a degree that is frequently repulsive to our moral sense; and the place we covet for Jesus Christ is far other than one among the Hindu pantheon.

The second way of preaching Christ is to begin with His humanity. Some one said to me a few weeks ago, in criticism of a well-known story in which the scene is laid in Palestine in the days of Jesus, that it was very interesting, but that it was not right so "to humanise the Lord of Glory." I understand what is meant by the criticism, but it appears to me that behind the apparent reverence for Him there is a completely unworthy distrust of Jesus

Christ shown in such an expression as that. Tell the story of Jesus as a man among men, making no special claim for Him, and give Him a chance to-day to do what He did then, in open competition against all comers. He won the devotion of men then, when they had a chance to know Him; "I, if I be lifted up," He said, "will draw all men unto Myself," and we do no wrong to the meaning of those words if we include in it not alone the lifting up on the Cross, but also the lifting up in the written word, and in the living testimony of His followers. We shall show our real loyalty and faith in Him if we attempt to make men see Him as He was, rather than to impress upon them our opinion of Him. Tell the story, and leave the hearers to supply the comments; and if we tell the story aright we shall have no need to talk about His love and holiness: they themselves will see Him as He is. No arguments of ours can strengthen His position; He is Himself the best argument.

This raises at once the question of Jesus' relation to the miraculous. If He is to be presented as man, what place in our story are we to give to His wondrous works? It is clear that to use them, as is so often done, to prove the fact of His divinity, is altogether inconsistent with the line of approach we are discussing. To omit them, or to minimise their importance, is to be unfaithful to the very record of the human life to which we are making our appeal. To treat them as special interpositions of God at the instance of Jesus is, for very many, to rob Jesus of His place among the great heroes of the race; it produces much the feeling of dissatisfaction that some of us

remember very vividly when in the Iliad a god or goddess came in towards the end of some fierce conflict and whisked a favourite out of pressing danger into some place of unapproachable safety. The hero so saved ceases to be altogether the hero; and, if our boyish instinct was sound, we must be careful not to represent Jesus as doing anything that would rob Him of the place that is His—chief of the Captains of the race, most heroic among its heroes. May we not truly represent Him in His temptation as winning in the fight by the use of resources available also for us? May we not say that His power over disease and death and over the very forces of nature was joined in Him with a perfect holiness, with an unbroken communion with the Father, and that it may well be part of the scheme of things that only to perfect holiness shall such power be given? His temptations were real; His conflicts were not a mere pageant whose conclusion was foregone, but a bitter strife in which the fulfilment of the very purpose of God was at stake. Only so do Gethsemane and Calvary fit in with the record of that brave and perfect life.

Our emphasis then must be on the historic Jesus; our appeal must be away from abstraction and theories of all sorts to the facts of Jesus' life on earth and of his continued influence in the world. We must make it clear—and not least here in India—that Christianity is not a merely subjective experience, that it is not dependent solely on the mood of the moment or on the flashes of an inward light, but that it had a historical origin in a historical person. In this country it is peculiarly difficult to establish firmly

the fundamental difference between fact and fancy; but for the proclamation of Christianity it is hardly too much to say that the establishment of that difference is essential, and that the development of the historic sense is a supremely important part of the missionary's task.

Someone has said that a chief value of great men is that their biographies fertilise the minds of the adolescent. Jesus Christ, taken simply as a great man, has that virtue in Him. We may trust Him, on His merits, and without any bolstering up on our part, to win His rightful place. Not with adolescents only; with little children too, He still has power. I know a little girl of two and a half, whose mind has not been burdened with theology but who has been told the story of Jesus. One day a stranger called, and to make him feel at home she took her picture books and began to show him all the wonders they contained. Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Old King Cole — one after the other the glorious company was displayed before him. And then, quite suddenly, she looked up into his eyes and said, with eager expectant delight: "And do you know Jesus?" He had won His place among all possible rivals; and the truth I am trying to bring home is that in every age, against all the rivals that can present themselves, He is able sooner or later to assert His supremacy by His own inherent quality.

III. We must avoid over-emphasis on aspects of God not emphasised by Jesus.

I will repeat what I said earlier with regard to Christian theology; it is the attempt to explain God

on the evidence supplied by Jesus Christ, Now a moment's thought will show that there is a great deal that comes in the forefront of much of our thinking and teaching about God, about which Jesus has little or nothing to say. I am not suggesting that this may not be largely true and possess very real value, but merely that it is not necessary to complicate Christian theology by giving such conceptions basal importance. It is frequently said that it was not necessary for Jesus to give much teaching about the omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, of God, because to the Jews, all these ideas were already perfectly familiar, and that moreover, to the world at large, revelation on these points would have been superfluous; by the light of nature, men have always been able to learn as much as they need about these lofty attributes. This is doubtless to a large extent true; but is it not also likely to be true, that one reason for the slightness of the treatment they receive in the Gospels, is that they are not, in Jesus' view, of the same grade of importance as the truths about God which He does persistently emphasize? Into the current view of God which most of us hold, there entered contributions from very many different sources; much has come from the Old Testament, much from St. Paul—much also from classical antiquity, and it may be from Norse or even Indian thought. We have assumed without analysis that the whole body of our thought about God is Christian, but, as Glover has pointed out in a most suggestive chapter of "The Jesus of History," we all of us bring to the study of the gospels so many preconceived notions about God that

it is very difficult to discover what are the distinctively Christian elements in our belief.

It is already a widely accepted canon of criticism that whatever in the Old Testament revelation of God is inconsistent with the later revelation through Jesus Christ, must be interpreted in the light of the later revelation; we do not look upon God as a "jealous" God in the ordinary acceptance of the term, though the Old Testament uses that expression about Him, because we are not able to fit in that conception of God's character with the conception that Jesus held. We reconcile the old and new as far as we are able, but there are some things which intellectual honesty does not allow us to reconcile, and we are not in any degree troubled by this, because we recognise that there has been a gradual development in man's powers to appreciate divine truth, and that the revelation grasped in one age would have been premature in an earlier. Now the principle which we apply in this case, where there seems to be disagreement in our authorities, is a principle which we must be prepared to apply relentlessly, whenever we are confronted by apparently insuperable difficulties in our thinking. Jesus Christ is our supreme and final authority, and if anything that comes from Him is inconsistent with ideas we get from any other quarter, our business is not to whittle down Jesus' teaching to fit in with the other ideas, but to attempt as far as may be to reconcile the other ideas with what Jesus has taught, and if we fail — as in some cases we shall — then to let the other ideas go, whatever their sanctions may be. Theology, even Chris-

tian theology, defined as I have defined it, can never be simple; "God only knows the mind of God;" but much of its complexity is due to the attempt to give the central place both to the great conception that was central for Jesus, and to that other series of conceptions which generally hold so large a place in men's religious thinking, but which He did not think it worth while to emphasize.

Our thought thus far has been that in leading men to God through Jesus Christ, we should not burden them with theology; we must first win their interest in Jesus. That further, we should not present Jesus to them in the first instance as divine, but that, showing Him as a man among men, we should allow Him to make His own impression, and win His own position. And finally, that in any words we speak about God, we should give decisive importance only to what we learn of Him through Jesus, keeping in a strictly subordinate place all ideas that have come to us from any other source.

II. The Approach.

Among the outstanding problems of our time in the missionary world are those connected with the great mass-movements towards Christianity. Our brethren in many fields are no longer facing many of the problems that vex us; theirs is the embarrassment of a success, a rapidity of progress, with which they do not know how to cope. Our hearts glow as we read of the triumphs that the Gospel is winning, and we feel that nowhere are we nearer to the spirit and mind of our Master than when we are preaching good tidings and bringing deliverance to the poor and down-trodden. And yet it would be a mistake to assume that merely by mass-movements the great task of bringing India to Christ will be accomplished, and that the church should bend all her energies and throw all her resources into the work of evangelising the lower and more receptive classes. Part of our task is also to face and satisfy the keenest intellects and the most trained judgments that this country can bring to bear on the great questions of religion, and our truest wisdom is to carry on all parts of our enterprise at once.

Corresponding to the complexity of the problems that face us there is a very great variety of methods of approach. I would suggest two clear alternatives. There is first the time-honoured method of the guru with his disciples; this is a method which must

generally be adopted, with suitable modifications, by those who work among ignorant and backward classes, and the position of guru is also one which has again and again been accorded to great educationists by their pupils. I need not pause to point out the very great advantages that there are when such a relationship can be established; the responsibility is tremendous, but the opportunities of powerful influence are almost unlimited. The other method is that of the one who acknowledges himself also to be a humble searcher after truth; and this is the method which, as it seems to me, will more and more have to be our way of working with educated and thoughtful men. The days have gone when a young man from a western land, simply because he is from a western land, will be listened to with deference and his words accepted as authoritative. He is going to count at his true value, and it may be that increasingly he will have a hard struggle to count even at that. But in any case, the position of guru, unhealthy as it has always tended to be in its influence on the character of the young man who has been forced into it, is no longer tenable, and the alternative course is to start on a common level, with a common eagerness to discover truth, and a common determination to obey it at all hazards. On this point I would be very explicit; I do not suggest that this is a useful pose to adopt, and that all the time there should be the reserve at the back of our mind that of course really we know perfectly well where our investigation is going to come out. That is to be essentially dishonest, and such dishonesty will vitiate any good we may think to

accomplish. Our search must be a genuine search, and if it leads to conclusions that we have not expected we must be unflinching still in our acceptance of them. From this standpoint there is very great value in the action of the men who have left missionary service in order to join Rabindranath Tagore.

In such a common search it will not always be possible for us to choose the lines on which it shall proceed; we may often have to start out on lines that we are persuaded will lead to nowhere; it may sometimes surprise us to learn that our persuasion is wrong. But when we have the choice of ground from which to start it is obvious that there are some methods of approach that are more likely to be fruitful than others. I propose to suggest a line of thought that may lead a man by steps whose validity he will acknowledge to a facing of what Jesus Christ means for him and for the world. The method throughout will be historical, for I believe that it is in the fact of the Incarnation that we come more near to the reality of things than anywhere else.

We will start with the fact of the Christian church in India to-day. In one aspect it presents the quite familiar phenomenon of a company of people banded together more or less loosely in a search for God and heaven, for themselves. It has many points in common, and some points of difference, with other religious organisations. Among the points of difference that call for special note is this; here and there, all over India, there are hospitals and schools and all manner of other philanthropic institutions

established by money from the west, and very largely staffed by people from the west. These institutions are not for the good of the people whose money has gone into them, nor for the good of the people who are controlling them, nor even for the good of their co-religionists, but for the good of others, of another race, and especially for the good of the poor and oppressed. And this is not confined to India; in China and Africa and in the islands of the sea the same thing may be seen, on an ever-increasing scale. And the essence of it is service of others, without hope of reward. India and China boast rightly of civilisations venerable before ours was born; but in all their distinguished story there is no record of any activity remotely comparable to that of Christian missions. Looking over the past centuries the record of Christianity has been the same; where it has gone, sooner or later slavery has disappeared, sooner or later the position of woman has been raised, and the exploiting of little children has been shown in its true light. It has carried the breath of a new life into literature and into political as well as social affairs.

Now it is perfectly true that this is a one-sided picture, and nowhere in the world to-day is it possible for the advocate of Christianity even if he wishes, to conceal the other side. The charge that through a great part of its history the Christian church has shown itself to be the enemy of freedom of thought and even the persecutor of the pioneers of progress is one that cannot be rebutted; not alone in the pages of such writers as Lecky, and in our own time Bury (in his very suggestive little "History of Freedom

of Thought,") who may be supposed to have something of a bias against orthodox Christianity, but written unmistakably in the record of those whose purpose has been definitely apologetic, is a sad story, on the one hand of bigotry and persecution, on the other of weakness and slackness. At the present moment it is Christendom that is rent asunder by the war, and if it be urged that this is not to be laid to the door of the Christian church the attack can be brought nearer home and the narrowness and exclusiveness and ineffectiveness of great masses of the Christian community may fairly be urged in criticism. It is a terrible and shameful picture that is thus presented to us. But, at the worst, with every mistake interpreted as a crime, the resultant of the two statements is not mere nothing; the evil and the good do not cancel each other; each remains to be accounted for. If the church has done many things in the name of religion that it should not have done it does not in the slightest degree alter the reality of the philanthropic and unselfish work that it has done; it may have made that work less effective, but in any case the work stands; in any case Christianity is to-day doing things in a way and on a scale that is not to be found elsewhere; in any case, in almost every country of the world to-day, and in contact with almost every form of civilisation and barbarism, it is engaged on the same task that it essayed nineteen hundred years ago—the preaching of deliverance to the captives, the bringing of light to them that are in the shadow of death. And the question that calls for answer at this stage is, how these unique pheno-

mena are to be explained. In Christianity there have been blunders, and worse; but the blunders have not been able entirely to rob Christianity of a power which, diminished as through all its history it has been by errors and misinterpretations and self-seekings, is still the outstanding force in the world that makes for righteousness. Within this religion there must be some secret of amazing power to enable it to counteract so great a mass of evil within itself and still to have an overflowing energy which is not afraid to tackle any task connected with the redemption of humanity.

Now it is possible to suggest many causes for the distinctive Christian energy of which we have been speaking. But it is clearly not enough to suggest, as some have done, that the system of ethics in Christianity is responsible for the Christian passion; this, or the profound Christian theology, or some other of the various suggested causes, may be quite sufficient to account for what appears to be the normal behaviour and experience of the average Christian. But our concern is with something very much more remarkable; and while the *odium theologicum* is a very real force, responsible for much that is discreditable to our human nature neither it nor its less questionable associates can be regarded as having the quality necessary for the sustained and reasoned carrying out of the great Christian enterprise. It is perhaps the truest wisdom to get away from theories as to what the secret of the power of Christianity may have been, to the statements which we find in our earliest Christian records as to that secret, and to see

if those statements have been borne out by the facts. Jesus spoke to His disciples on this matter, and told them with perfect plainness that the one secret of effectiveness for them was to maintain the closest possible relationship with Him; "without Me," He said, "ye can do nothing." They were to be united with Him in moral purpose; the law of their life was to be that which they had seen Him, unflinching obedience to the will of God; and service was to take the place of self-seeking. When He was removed from their vision, His followers are reported to have taken all the great decisions of their lives in consultation with the Spirit which they had been taught to expect would be His representative in counselling and strengthening them. But it was Jesus' way that they proclaimed, and Jesus to whom they referred in connection with all that they undertook. One of them put it plainly and succinctly when he said "The love of Christ constraineth me." The teaching of the Founder of the religion, and the practice and testimony of the early adherents of the religion—who were also among those who most signally achieved tasks that are generally regarded as impossible—are thus in agreement: there is a connection between the position given to Jesus, and the accomplishment of the distinctive Christian activities. With this clue the history of the intervening centuries may be interrogated. It is not possible at this time to work out the detailed proof of the conclusion that I believe to be the truth, but it is a study very well worth pursuing. Speaking broadly, the result appears to be this: that where Jesus has been given the central place in the thought and

devotion of the church it has been filled with a spirit which has laughed at impossibilities, with a zeal that has seen in persecution a call to save the persecutor from himself, with an energy that has claimed the world for its parish. That this has not seldom been accompanied by blindness in other directions and by a fanaticism which has again and again defeated its own ends, is also true; but with Jesus Christ in His place as Lord and Leader the Church has been strong and eager to achieve greatly. And the converse is true; whenever He has been deposed—whether in favour of His mother, or of the Pope, or of a book, or of hard and fast theories about Him, or merely cast out by the common place rivals within our own hearts—the church has tended to become selfish and narrow and over-ridden with priestcraft and ecclesiasticism. It is evidently not enough to treat Jesus merely as the Way, and then to discard Him; He is also the Truth, and the Life.

This brings us to a further stage in our enquiry. If Jesus is as a matter of fact the spring of all that is most characteristic in the Church's achievement it is necessary that we should look most closely at everything we can discover about Him. If the position taken up is true, we have already learnt not a little about Him; it is He who has been working through the ages in His church, and we cannot estimate Him aright if we ignore all that the church has done. But the more interested we are in this, the more eager are we to read the record of the life that He lived among men.

It is of importance that we should be clear as to the claims we make for the books in which the record of that life is contained. Our present concern is not with the views that we may hold for ourselves with regard to the Bible; there is among Christians a very wide divergence on this matter. But whatever our own views may be, for the non-Christian the Bible is simply one book among many; he may look at it with respect or aversion greater than would otherwise be the case because he knows it to be sacred to Christians; but for him it possesses no special authority, and any value he may attach to it will ultimately depend on its intrinsic merits. He approaches it now simply because it is the source-book with regard to Jesus Christ, and as thus far we have made no supernatural claims whatever in connection with Him, so now we shall be well advised to make no claim for the New Testament save as a work of history. Its reliability is open to question just as that of any other history; questions of authorship, date and the like are all relevant, and we do not shrink from the most searching investigation in these matters. If the Gospels be proved by accepted canons of historical criticism to be unreliable as a record of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, our enquiry on this line can proceed no further; we are left with a living Christianity whose chief power seems on good evidence to be its connection with one Jesus, but about that Jesus we are unfortunately unable to discover anything of importance. But sound historical criticism does not lead to that conclusion, and we are as a matter of fact in a position to continue our enquiry with the New

Testament as our text book, accepted as a credible historical record of things that actually took place nearly two thousand years ago.

What then is the idea of Jesus Christ that we gain when we approach the New Testament with the eager desire to know what it was in Him which during His life and since His death made Him so influential a person in the history of the world? There are many things that stand out in the record, and it will be possible to name only a few of them, and that by way of suggestion rather than of exposition.

(i) Jesus is pre-eminently the Teacher — one who from the beginning of His ministry spoke with certainty and authority about God and human life. He does not speak as an enquirer after truth, but as one who knows. The basis of what He teaches is His certainty of the Fatherhood of God, and starting from this He upholds a moral and spiritual ideal of perfection for men, who are the children of the heavenly Father.

(ii) In His life, no less than in His teaching, He upholds the ideal of perfection. In no particular does His teaching excel His actual life, but at every turn it finds its justification and explanation in it. Thus also with regard to the loftiest teaching of His followers, in order to understand all that is involved in it we have to turn to its original in the life of Jesus; St. Paul's panegyric on Love in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians stands out in full splendour of meaning only when we realise that everything he says about love has been displayed in the actual achieve-

ment of Jesus Christ. But there is more in the character of Jesus than this. By the testimony of His enemies no less than of the followers who were with Him continually and who were therefore in a position where they could see all the strength and all the weakness of their hero when He was off His guard, He was without fault; "no man is a hero to his valet," but Jesus stood the test even of that closest intimacy with the Twelve. But beyond even this there is an element in Jesus which appears the more remarkable when we study the lives of the greatest saints and seers of the race. He taught as one who did not need to grope after the truth: and He lived as one who was not conscious of sin in Himself. The record of the saints is at one in this matter: those who fain would serve God best are conscious most of wrong within; the clearer the vision they have obtained of the glory unapproachable, the more unmistakable has been their recognition of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and their sense of utter unfitness to stand before that great white throne. But there is not only no hint of confession of sin in all that is narrated of Jesus and no acknowledgement of need for repentance, but there is throughout the unmistakable assumption that in this matter He is apart from His fellows. Were His life one in which the most careful scrutiny could detect a failure of character we should be entitled to put this down to an inexplicable blindness in Jesus — a blindness to essential facts of His own nature which would make it impossible for His beautiful character to receive the unquestioning admiration we should otherwise give it. But to treat it so in face of all the evidence would

be false to the historical method we are pursuing. We are not attempting to explain what we find in Him, but we must honestly note what appear to be the facts, in order that at the end we may come to a true judgment.

(iii) Closely connected with what has been said above with regard to the sense of apartness in the matter of sin of which we are conscious when we study the life of Jesus, is the extraordinary nature of the claims which He makes upon the devotion of men. On one side His influence has been altogether to strengthen the rights of the individual man; but in this particular He unhesitatingly tells men that they must forget themselves, ignore and if need be hate the closest relationships that life can give, for the sake of following Him. They are to esteem it the greatest privilege to be called to follow Him; with the clearest knowledge of what following Him would in many cases involve, He compares it to a procession of condemned criminals, bearing the instruments of their own execution on their shoulders. Such a claim from any one else might seem outrageous; it might appear to necessitate a sacrifice of self-respect that no man of spirit or of intellect could accept; but as a matter of fact Jesus was never without followers on His own terms—men and women who agreed to live their lives on the basis of His own words, that without Him they could do nothing.

(iv) Connected with this, and undoubtedly to a considerable extent accounting for it, is what for lack of a better word we must call the winsomeness of

Jesus' character. When John wished to sum up in a phrase the total impression that His Friend and Master had made on him, he said that He was "full of grace and truth," and we do no wrong to his meaning, when we say that part of what is included in the untranslatable word he uses, is best expressed in English by some such word as "charm." I am not going to attempt to analyse the elements of that charm, but that He had it is apparent when we recall the diversity of men and women to whom He appealed. Children were at home with Him; young men were able to overcome the barriers of habitual reserve and talk with Him about the problems that were vexing them; publicans and sinners, the very women of the street — classes who have found something repellent in the "goodness" of the followers of Jesus in later ages, — found nothing repellent in Him, and sinless though He was, found Him so congenial a companion at their feasts as to give occasion to the gibe that He was gluttonous and a wine-bibber, and a friend of people such as no respectable person could associate with. The playfulness and homeliness of many of His illustrations confirm the impression of His friendships — that His goodness was altogether free from sourness and aloofness, and that His winsomeness was one of the characteristics that most forcibly impressed those who met Him.

(v) Of His unwearying helpfulness I need not pause to speak; another of His followers summed up His life in the words "He went about doing good," and the Gospels are full of the records of His service by word and deed. He used the power that came

from His unbroken intimacy with the Father, never for purely personal ends, never to gratify the prying curiosity of His intellectual critics, but always and most lavishly for the benefit of the poor and helpless. He did not limit the scope of His usefulness by a rigorous enquiry into the deserts of all who came to Him; sickness and misery were themselves sufficient passport to His pitying tenderness.

(vi) There have been those who, while accepting much of what has been said above of Jesus, would nevertheless regard Him simply as "the pale Galilean." But one other element which impresses the careful reader of the Gospels is the very reverse of what is implied in such a criticism — His strength. The courage that was required of Him was that of the pioneer who has to stand alone; and as we read the story of His life we see how, to the very end, without the intelligent understanding of a single one among His twelve disciples, He took a line of action which led Him into direct conflict with the leaders of the religious life of the time, and the issue of which, as He well foresaw, could only be an apparently ignominious defeat for Himself. Opportunity after opportunity for compromise presented itself, sometimes on terms that might well seem sufficiently favourable to be considered; but Jesus did not falter; the clearness of discernment, the swiftness and sureness of decision, that are so apparent in the story of the temptation in the wilderness, marked His life throughout, and at the end He died, unflinching, because He was faithful to truths that were unpopular. Not that His strength was that of one who, in a fine rhapsody

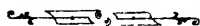
lost all sense of pain and difficulty; the Garden, the cry upon the Cross, are proof enough that Jesus' courage was of the sort that holds on its course while tasting to the utter dregs all the pain and bitterness of anguish that are involved; "He *suffered*, being tempted." Every element in His human nature was sensitive and responded to every stroke of physical and mental agony that the malice of His enemies was able to inflict. But He went through to the end, enduring the cross and the shame.

The story does not end here: it was impossible that He should be held by death, and our records tell us that He rose again; that, culmination of all the mighty works that He had wrought in His unbroken fellowship with His Father, came this, mightiest of all. Again our present task is not to say how we explain what happened, but to take the facts as part of our material for judging Jesus Christ; along the line of thought that we have been following it is natural to suggest that the resurrection of Jesus was but another vindication of the truth for which Jesus' whole life is evidence, that perfect holiness and perfect power are inseparable.

However that may be as a matter of history, it is this story of Jesus Christ which has been the most powerful influence that the world has known, for the changing of men's habits of mind and character. Analysis of the story destroys much at least of its life; but this story, in its simplicity, is the story that has succeeded in stirring men's hearts to great issues, from the time when Jesus walked among men

until our own day. Nor has it simply taken men unawares by its charm, and swept them into an enthusiasm of action of which in their soberer moments they have been ashamed. The story has held men's devotion because it is something more than a pictorial presentation of truth and morals; it is a record of facts, not only full of emotional appeal, but of a sort also that becomes the more impressive as it is subjected to the most searching and dispassionate enquiry that cold reason can suggest.

III. The Goal.



In a suggestive essay on "The Principle of Authority," contained in "Foundations" — a book of theological essays published a few years ago by a group of Oxford scholars,— the life of the educated Christian of to-day is divided into three stages. The first stage is that of bondage to authority; he believes certain things because he is told to. In the second stage, which the essayist describes as one of "abstract freedom", he asserts his right to criticise and even deny the things which in the first stage he unquestioningly accepted. In the third stage, that of "concrete freedom," he gives his voluntary assent on grounds of reason to what was formerly believed on authority. There is no doubt that there are very large numbers of Christians who to-day are in the second of the three stages so described, and if they are again to accept the great truths of the Christian religion, it will be for reasons largely independent of the considerations which governed them in the first stage. In other words, within Christianity itself there is a great company of people who no longer bow down to authority; the idea of an infallible Pope, or of an authoritative Church, or of a verbally inspired Bible, as the final governor in matters of life and religion, is an idea which for well or ill they can never hold again. There are those who urge that for such people the Christian religion can no longer have any sure

basis, and that the abandonment of "authority" is the abdication of the claims of Christianity altogether. There are those, on the other hand, no less loyal to the religion of Jesus Christ, who maintain that Christianity has everything to gain by the abandonment of an intellectual position that in any degree involves bondage. They are persuaded that the logical issue is from the second stage to the third; they do not for a moment concede what appears to have been conceded with scarcely a protest in the old days, when the term "free thought" was accepted as synonymous with atheism; freedom of thought, they hold, is part of the heritage of our life which we are privileged to use, and which will lead us not away from God, but ever nearer and nearer to Him. Within Christianity there has been too much of the cowardice which is afraid to think; our position should rather be that of Tertullian; "it becomes Truth to play with her rivals, because she has no fear."

For the missionary, at any rate, it is difficult to see that there is any other course open than to accept the principle of absolute freedom. A great part of his work consists of directly or indirectly provoking thought among the people of this country, of arousing within their minds doubts as to the binding force of old customs and traditions, of suggesting that religion tends to become overlaid with masses of superstition. We are sometimes almost dismayed as we contemplate some of the results of our success in this direction: educated India, still conforming largely to ancient custom, but with an ever-spreading agnosti-

cism of belief; freed from the shackles that genuine religious conviction imposes, but with no other sanctions as yet accepted for the guidance of the moral life. We, in combination with many other influences, have undermined the principle of authority in religion in India; and it therefore hardly seems probable that in obedience to some other application of the same principle the Indian mind will submit itself to the control of Christianity. It is with this pre-supposition that if India is to come to Christ it must come freely, with its eyes wide open — that the line of approach we have been considering has been suggested; and with the further conviction that the allegiance of men free in mind and will is of far greater value in the Kingdom of God than the service of those who are in bondage to any kind of authority, other than that of the living Spirit of God.

Our line of thought thus has been based simply upon verifiable facts of history; no supernatural claims of any kind have been made for Jesus Christ, but we have seen that, explain it how we may, He has been a very great force for the uplifting of the human race, ever since He appeared in the world nineteen hundred years ago. There remains for us the further problem of relating this Jesus of history to the religious life of the present day. The problem is not simple, but we may continue to follow the same methods as hitherto. Our investigation of history has been a careful enquiry into the recorded facts of human experience; we have not been greatly concerned with the various theories that have been promulgated through the ages in consequence of that

experience, and it will be well if we still prefer experience to theory. The facts that we have to go upon are briefly, that nineteen hundred years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth there are great numbers of men in the world who are ready to state with the utmost sobriety of judgment that that Jesus is the Ruler of their lives. If we can understand what they mean by this, we have succeeded in getting somewhere near to the centre of our problem, and especially so if, checking their evidence carefully with the great mass of testimony on this point that has accumulated during the centuries, we find that there is substantial agreement between them.

First of all, there will be no discrepancy of witnesses as to the fact that still Jesus Christ is the great Example of the Good Life; He remains what He was when He moved among men, the one whose teaching and life are in perfect harmony. He is the one who held up the standard of perfection with an enthusiasm and belief in its possibility that have proved infectious right through the ages, and that still infect men in spite of themselves. Jesus is the Ideal Man realised; and in that fact alone many have found the chief inspiration of life.

But more than that, Jesus is still the great Leader, calling men to difficult and hairbreadth adventure, just as really and just as irresistibly as in the old days He called men to forsake all to follow Him. In curious ways that are probably incapable of accurate analysis, He makes known to those whom He chooses what He wants them to do. One man,

who has before him the prospect of a happy and successful life as a medical doctor at home, hears the call of his Master to go to China; he goes, against all the advice of his friends, and within a few weeks of his arrival, lays down his life in ministering to crowds of plague-stricken Chinese. Another hears the same Voice, and in obedience to it goes to Africa, and there bends all the powers of a fine and highly trained intellect to the task, spread over many long years, of teaching negroes in the lowest depths of savagery, something of the love of God...And so I might go on, illustrating from the lives of the people at home no less clearly than from the ever-widening records of the Mission field. But to such a company as this, whose very presence here is evidence of the reality of that Leadership and the irresistible authority with which that Voice still makes itself heard further illustration is superfluous. If we are asked why we obeyed, it may not be so easy to give an answer; some would have to say that they did their best to refuse, but that at last, unable to endure the sense of discomfort that was upon them, they had to yield. And many would say, that certainly since obeying, there has come into their lives a fullness of satisfaction, a peace and a joy, such as they can only explain by the thought that they have done right in yielding obedience. It almost seems, they say, that there is something in the very constitution of our nature to which that Voice makes its appeal, and that we are therefore most truly ourselves when we are acting in perfect obedience to it.

And this brings me to the last unwavering testimony that I propose to suggest as relevant to our

enquiry. The man who has obeyed Jesus Christ can state unhesitatingly that Jesus when obeyed is not to be distinguished by him from God. If he goes a step further, and says that Jesus is God, he may at once be challenged; he is making a statement which is incapable of the sort of proof we are demanding; he is giving his opinion and not his experience. But if he says that in his own experience his relationship with Jesus has satisfied the needs of his life, that he has never felt the need or the possibility of getting, as it were, behind Jesus Christ to a deeper and truer relationship with God, that for him — to use the formula of a much-criticised school of theology — Jesus has “the value of God” — he is saying things that no one else is competent to criticise; he is bearing testimony as to things of which he is himself the sole judge. Now, behind much confused expression, this is exactly what the Christian does say about Jesus Christ. It is true that he has sometimes grown so excited about asserting the theological proposition which he cannot prove, that Jesus *is* God, that he has grown a little careless as to the very much more important matter of allowing Jesus in any case to have the value of God in his life; but the very assertion of the more difficult proposition carries with it the acceptance of the fact of experience on which it must largely rest. All the things that God may be supposed to do for His children come to the Christian through Jesus Christ; all the qualities that the highest thought of the race has been able to predicate of the Unknown God are qualities which we find most shiningly present in Jesus Christ; and therefore we

give to Him the Name that is above every name; we acknowledge Him to be the Lord.

This is as far as our enquiry can carry us; is it then as far as the Hindu, whom we have had in mind in all that has been said, may be expected to go? From my own experience it appears to me that the point at which the difficulty will come is when we leave the consideration of Christ as our Example, and pass on to the thought of Him as the living Leader, calling still to obedience. Many a Hindu young man has heard that call; some have obeyed, and have found the fullness of life that always comes with perfect obedience; many have tried to close their ears and to forget that ever they have heard. But many who are familiar with the story of Jesus have never felt His personal appeal, and we have not succeeded in our task until we have made our Hindu friend hear the call; everything else is preparatory to that. That is the convincing evidence that we are following something more than a distant example; if he can hear the call, we have brought him near enough to Jesus for him to have the terrible responsibility of obeying or rejecting Him; if he never hears he cannot be expected to obey. What then are we to do if our friend tells us, quite honestly, that while he accepts our statement with regard to our own experience of Jesus Christ and recognises that there must be something very weighty behind an experience shared by so many in our own and earlier times, nevertheless, as far as he is concerned, Jesus remains simply a majestic and beautiful Figure in the page of history, an Example and Teacher to whom he is

ready to pay deference, but certainly not one who has ever made any sort of claim for personal obedience. Such an attitude is the natural result of any attempt to reach Jesus Christ by any purely intellectual approach, for while by its means we can come very near, we cannot come near enough. He will not be treated as a mere problem of reason, and it is impossible to make Him the subject of experimentation. He will not be known to men who approach Him as if it were possible to do so on terms of equality; there must be some sense of need if we are to know Him as He is.

From the writers of the New Testament down to the Christian thinkers of our own time there has been a strong emphasis on the necessity of "faith" in those who come to Christ; without that attitude of the whole being which is called "faith" it is impossible for men really to come to Him. Now faith is not the mere intellectual assent to a proposition or a creed; in the Christian sense of the term it means, essentially, self-surrender to Jesus Christ. Now, psychologically a man may recognise this, and in a sense desire to make this surrender, and yet, somehow or other, feel unable. The story of Christian experience seems to suggest that it is only when, for one reason or another, a man recognises his own incompetence and poverty, that it is possible for him to make that absolute surrender of himself that brings with it the specific Christian sense of relief and satisfaction. The recognition of incompetence is a recognition of fact; it is not a morbid attempt to bring oneself into the right attitude for the venture of faith, an attempt

which can only serve as support for a faith which will be weak and dishonest. And so, in dealing with the Hindu, our business is not to talk to him about sin, and the idea that all men are sinful, and the impossibility of ever really knowing Jesus without acknowledging this; it is very doubtful whether the continual emphasis on sin in our teaching in this country ever really succeeds in doing what we desire it to do — that is, in bringing home to the conscience of a people whose whole theory of life is opposed to it, the sense of personal guilt and need. I would suggest that in this, as in all the other stages of our thought, we allow Jesus Christ Himself to do more. We have carried our Hindu friend with us to Jesus as our example, as the One who exhilarates us with the sense of great possibilities when we consider His own achievement. If He be considered yet more closely, may it not be that where all other means have failed to produce any sense of personal unworthiness and need, contact with His dazzling purity may do so? Historically, as we have noticed in another connection, it is when men get closest to God's great white throne, that they are most conscious of their own foulness; and surely if we can make Jesus appear as He is, in all the beauty of His holiness, He will Himself accomplish this work. It is His Spirit, He Himself said, which will convict the world in respect of sin; and the clearest way in which His Spirit can work is through the record of that spotless life. An appreciation however imperfect of the moral grandeur of Jesus will make self-satisfaction for ever impossible, and will thus plant the seeds of a discontent which may grow into

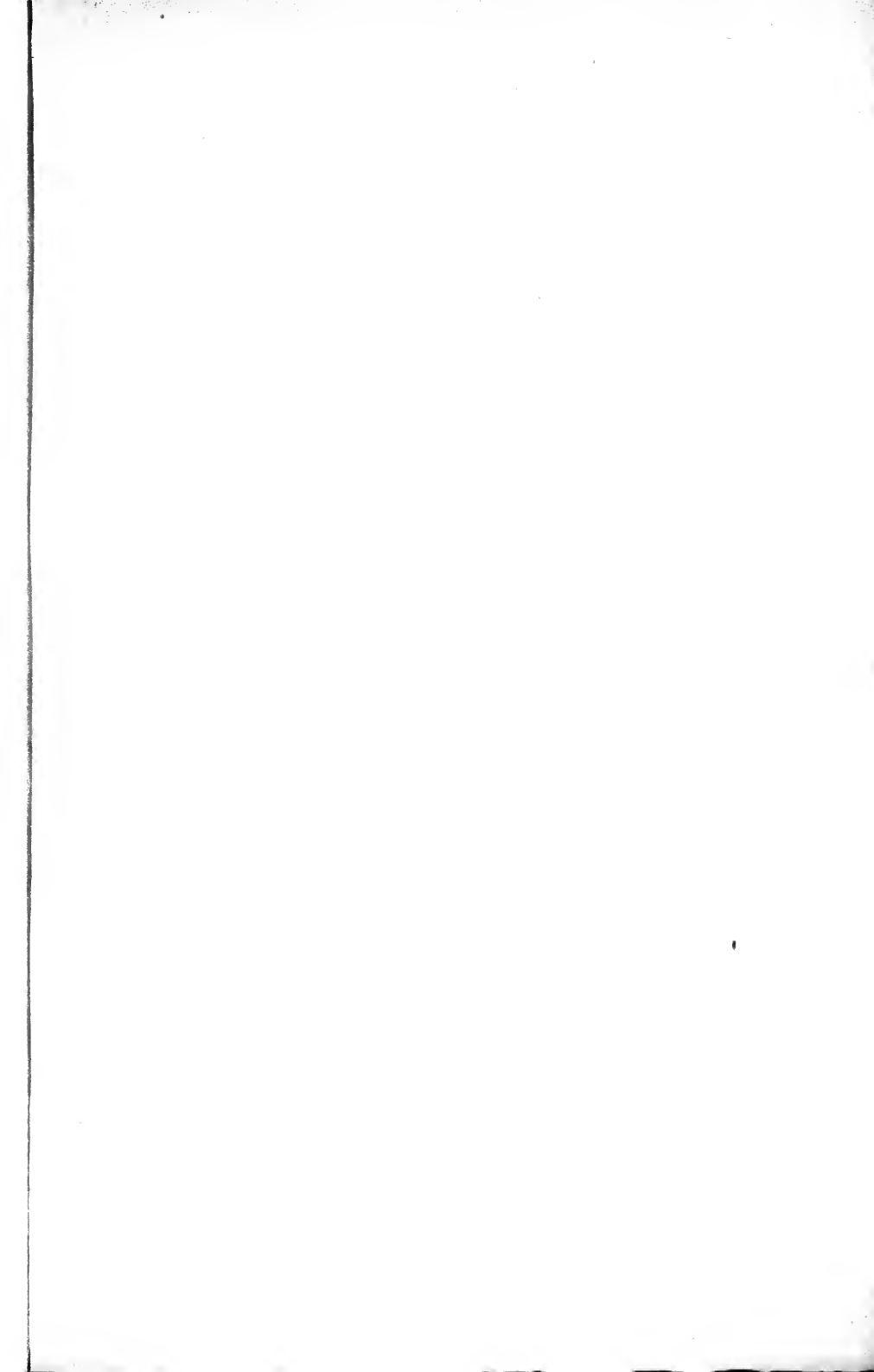
such self-despair as all our arguments about sin can never produce.

Not that it is by the sense of sin alone that a man is made to feel his utter need of a power greater than his own. One of the most promising signs of the times in India is the eagerness with which bands of young men are facing the social problems of the country, not merely in blue-books dealing with poverty and the like, but by actually going and themselves teaching in night-schools and in similar ways trying to help the hitherto untouched classes. The experience of the west has shown that for many who have tried this kind of work of social redemption it has meant the coming of a sense of hopelessness; drink and debt and poverty are so much more terrible when we are brought into real contact with them than they are in the pages of any book, however accurate its statistics or however vivid its characterisation; and the task of lifting men out of degradation is so much more difficult a task than it seemed when we first undertook to attempt it. And thus social reformers who have set out with a gospel of humanity have many of them found that for their own strengthening, no less than for the providing of an adequate motive power for the drink-sodden and poverty-ridden people they are working among, they must supplement it with something else. Some have not been able to do so, and have withdrawn from the unequal conflict against evil; some rare spirits have appeared to find all that they need in the ideal with which they set out; but many have turned to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and have found that it meets all the demands

they make upon it. I believe that in this country there are many insoluble social and economic problems, and that the closer a man gets to the actual life of the depressed classes the more deadly is the pressure upon him of the weight of custom and mental inertia and moral indifference which has to be lifted before they can really live a full human life. To the earnest social worker who is feeling this I suggest that we may fairly say that this class of insoluble problem is exactly the kind of thing that Jesus Christ has been dealing with for years. It is not merely that we believe that a religious motive is necessary if men are to be permanently uplifted morally and socially; but that our experience of the achievements of the Christian religion makes us sure that the most intractable situations yield to the influence of Jesus.

But in any case, whether through a sense of personal powerlessness to deal with evil habit, or from a recognition that for social redemption far greater forces are required than are at the disposal of ordinary men, or from an utter sense of need produced in any other way, psychologically it is true that despair is the best preparation for faith. A man has come to the conclusion that he is ultimately not equal to the task before him; he has tried all that he knows, and without result. He cannot be sure that the Jesus of whom he has heard will be able to do all that is claimed for Him; but at all events it will do no harm to try Him. And it is just that — the willingness to try Jesus, even before one is sure of Him — that constitutes initial faith. It is the taking of a despairing leap out into the dark, not knowing what awaits

one: and it is the finding there in the dark, round about and beneath, the everlasting arms of love. Faith in all its stages can only be justified by the results that follow its exercise; and it is this "evidence of things not seen," this "assurance of things hoped for" that no man can convey to another, but that each man must gain for himself, by risking everything that he is on the venture. "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine," said Jesus, and there is no other way, for Hindu or for Christian, of knowing whether Jesus is Divine or not save the way of humble obedience to His will.



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